

politics, his discussions of the 1924 Democratic National Convention, the 1928 presidential campaign, and the 1932 nomination contest are less satisfying. Nor is his writing about those “middle” sections of Smith’s life as spirited as that for the early and later years.

Throughout, Finan’s prose is clear, well-organized, and graceful. He weaves in well-chosen details and integrates Smith’s personal life and political career in an adroit way. Finan is rarely critical of his subject, but there is little overt editorializing and only once did I observe him putting a favorable spin on the words of Smith that he had just quoted. There are few outright mistakes, typographical or otherwise. Finan also uses quotations skillfully; regrettably, with three exceptions the endnotes cite only the sources of those quotations—not the other sources he consulted. The bibliography is unimpressive: Finan includes some less valuable sources with questionable relevance while omitting several indispensable volumes (by Oscar Handlin, Paula Eldot, and Allan J. Lichtman, for instance) that he cites in endnotes.

There are other shortcomings. Finan’s discussion of the New York Democrats’ 1918 nominating process is unclear. He underplays the Triangle Fire and overplays Smith’s attack on William Randolph Hearst as formative experiences in Smith’s career. Finan does not say enough about Belle Moskowitz, Jouett Shouse, and others who were important influences on Smith. Despite the fact that the Democratic Party’s two-thirds rule lay at the heart of the candidates’ strategic considerations during 1924 and 1932, Finan mentions the rule only obliquely. Finan’s description of the 1928 presidential campaign focuses almost entirely on the religious issue, with no detailed analysis of the voting returns. He sets forth the reasons why Smith and Roosevelt were moving apart after 1928 but then concludes that the split did not exist. In general, Finan often left me wondering where he himself stood on the controversial aspects of Smith’s career.

Like everyone else who has tried, Finan is only partially successful in showing how Smith’s political principles and actions developed over the years. Early on, he consistently paints Smith as a liberal who also believed in structural reforms that would strengthen the democratic process. Later, Finan concludes that Smith moved to the right (“without fully realizing it,” he says), but his explanation for this movement is not convincing. The puzzle that is Al Smith remains, and in the end this fascinating leader continues to elude us—which is why he is in no danger of becoming a forgotten man.

Maurertown, Virginia

Donn C. Neal

Robert Cohen, ed. *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. Pp. xi, 266. Cloth, \$29.95; ISBN 0-8078-2747-9. Paper, \$16.95; ISBN 0-8078-5413-1.

Robert Cohen, in *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt*, presents an edited collection of letters from youth (children and teenagers alike) written to Eleanor Roosevelt during the Great

Depression. The volume opens with a discussion of why these youth wrote to Roosevelt, and it notes how hard the Great Depression impacted children. Cohen includes a discussion in his introduction of what the New Deal did for children, why so many letters were written (he notes that up to 300,000 letters were written to Mrs. Roosevelt annually), and why these letters were written to Eleanor rather than to FDR. The bulk of the book, however, is not a discussion of children during the Great Depression, but a presentation of approximately 200 of their letters, allowing them to write their own history. Cohen divides the letters into four areas, focusing on child poverty in America, the effect of the Depression on education, the effect on social life, and how minorities experienced the Great Depression.

Cohen's work is a revealing look into how the youngest in America were shaped by the Depression, and how they sought assistance from the First Lady. The vast majority, if not all, of these letters request help in one way or another. Cohen's work opens with an introduction that provides a good, but brief, background to the Great Depression, and his epilogue addresses what response Eleanor Roosevelt took to these letters. Each chapter also contains an introduction that discusses the subject of that chapter before the letters are presented. This method provides enough context for the letters to be understood.

This book does have some difficulties, though. It is unclear what percentage of the total letters to Eleanor Roosevelt were from children and thus are represented here. Also, since these letters are only from children, one wanting a sense of the entire Great Depression would do best to look elsewhere, and a good set of letters would be Robert McElvaine's *Down and Out in the Great Depression*. However, this book would serve as a good companion to McElvaine's work for those interested in using two volumes on the subject in their classes. In addition, this reader was left wondering throughout the book what Eleanor Roosevelt did with these letters; this query was answered fully, but only in the epilogue. Those using this book in classes might do well to read the ending first. These letters are quite depressing, which reflects the overall tenor of the Great Depression, and that fact is best known going in.

These are mere quibbles though, and Cohen has presented a fine work, generally well organized, presented, and edited. This work could be well used as a source for lectures, and as primary source material for students to consult, along with other sources from the Great Depression, or in conjunction with other works on the period. This is a worthwhile look at the voices of the "younger generation."

University of Kentucky

Scott A. Merriman